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AMGT, GR  
SUBJECT: GREECE H1N1 FLU UPDATE: 7,000 STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL; MASS  
VACCINATION MID-OCTOBER

REF: 09 ATHENS 691; 09 ATHENS 1035; 09 ATHENS 1389

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11. SUMMARY. The number of confirmed H1N1 cases has exceeded 2,100 in Greece in the period May-October 2009 but the unrecorded infections are estimated at 20 to 30 times that number. Greece had 12 serious cases and 3 fatalities from H1N1 infection to date, however 95 percent of patients have fully recovered. About 7,000 students nationwide have been out of school because they got the flu while four high schools in Athens were closed for a few days as a precaution. Health Minister announced the creation of three committees for A/H1N1 novel influenza as well as new vaccination centers and flu clinics. The inoculation of the general population in Greece will begin in late October with the vulnerable groups taking the lead. Meanwhile, parents and doctors object to mass vaccination plans, expressing concerns that the side effects of the new vaccine may outweigh the mild symptoms of the flu. END SUMMARY.  
H1N1 Cases  
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12. As of October 1, more than 2,100 cases of H1N1 infection have been diagnosed in Greece but the number of unrecorded infections is estimated at 20 to 30 times that number. According to the Ministry of Education at least 7,000 students nationwide have been absent because they came down with the novel flu since the beginning of the school year on September 11. Four high schools in the Athens broader area, including the American affiliated private schools Pierce College and Athens College, were closed for seven days following dozens of students presenting flu-like symptoms and taking leave as a precaution. The symptoms of the flu continue to be mild in the majority of the cases while 95 percent of patients have fully recovered. To date, Greece had 12 serious cases and 3 fatalities from H1N1 infection.  
Vaccination  
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13. Health Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos announced on October 1 that the inoculation of the general population in Greece would begin in 20 days' time beginning with the vulnerable groups. The Minister said that 100,000 vaccines have already been imported and are stored at the National Health Center facilities in Athens. Another 100,000 vaccines are due to arrive in the next few days. The vaccine will initially be administered to the vulnerable or high risk population groups, which are estimated at nearly 2.5 million people. Avramopoulos noted that the European Drugs Agency has recently approved the use of the novel flu vaccine and mass vaccinations would soon begin in several European countries.

14. Meanwhile, concerns about the side effects of the new vaccine are being expressed by parents and doctors in Greece. Parents Associations question the expediency of mass vaccinations and note the existence of special cases among those inoculated i.e. diabetics or those suffering from other diseases. The doctors' community has expressed similar concerns. A questionnaire measuring the intention to be vaccinated distributed to 152 doctors and dentists of the Social Security Center of Piraeus received 66 percent negative

answers, 20 percent undecided and only 14 percent positive answers. The mild symptoms of the flu H1N1 combined with the fear that the new vaccine has not been tested enough are the basis of these concerns.

Other GoG Measures

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¶5. A few weeks ago, Health Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos announced on September 1, the creation of three committees for A/H1N1 novel influenza as well as new vaccination centers and flu clinics to boost operational planning for coping with the disease. Avramopoulos said that the ministry would set up a Supreme Ethics and Conduct Committee for the flu as well as two special committees for epidemiological and clinical monitoring of its progress. The Minister emphasized that the instructions given by the World Health Organization (WHO) are being strictly adhered to. He thought the period of maximum intensity in the virus' progress was not expected to last long in Greece, where winters come later and end sooner. Education Minister Aris Spiliotopoulos also unveiled an action plan against novel influenza in schools ahead of the school opening on September 11. The action plan includes the operation of a special hotline through which the public receives information by specialized personnel, access to information through the education ministry website, a two-week educational television program with simplified guidelines for primary and secondary education school children and their parents, and the reservation of more than 45,000 vaccines for teaching personnel. In case of school closings, a special program on educational television is in operation for children who miss classes.

#### Private American Citizen Cases

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¶6. The Consular Sections in Athens and Thessaloniki monitor and provide assistance to private American citizens diagnosed with H1N1, and over the past months became familiar with twenty eight such cases, evenly divided between the two posts. In the last two months, however, there has only been one new case, involving a cruise ship passenger who also suffers from cystic fibrosis who is currently hospitalized in Athens. The last cases of Americans who were involuntarily quarantined occurred in early July.

#### Embassy plans

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¶7. The Embassy Medical Unit is coordinating H1N1 preparation and response according to guidance issued by the CDC and MED Washington. Currently, the Embassy is well stocked with supplies required during an influenza outbreak, to include anti-viral medications, various masks and respirators, gowns, gloves, and antibacterial hand-sanitizers. In addition, literature and guidance aimed at decreasing disease transmission along with patient education will be disseminated throughout the upcoming months to the Embassy community.

The Medical Unit is awaiting shipment of the seasonal influenza vaccine, and will encourage all Embassy personnel and families to be vaccinated, in accordance with CDC guidelines. Once H1N1 vaccine arrives from MED Washington, high-risk personnel will be vaccinated according to CDC recommendations; at this time, there is no target date for H1N1 vaccine arrival. In the past 4 months, there have not been any cases of documented Influenza A or H1N1 in our Embassy population. Should a spike in influenza cases occur in our population, the Medical Unit will work with Management to implement mission policies aimed at decreasing transmission and infection rates.

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